

RESEARCH PAPER

North Waziristan Militia

1900-1922

Historicism of a Militia

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The only Militia on Western Frontier to be decorated with a Victoria Cross, through the life of Militia the historicism of the Frontier and its cardinal causes of violence.

North Waziristan Militia 1900 -1922

In North Western Frontier region of Punjab the very first native militia was raised in 1878, The Khyber Rifles it was composed of irregular tribesmen commanded by a Sadozai Afghan of the royal family of Durrani the ruling elite, however the Rifles itself revolted in 1882. In 1892-3 Captain Roos Keppel form the Kurram Militia composed entirely of the local Turi Tribe, in the same period the Gilgit Scouts were raised by Colonel Algernon Durand as part of Gilgit Agency. Similarly in 1900 two militias were raised in Waziristan one as North Waziristan Militia (NWM) and other as South Waziristan Militia (SWM), collectively all were known as Frontier Irregular Corps.

North Waziristan Militia and South Waziristan Militia were raised as a consequence of Lord Curzon the Viceroy of India's **frontier policy**¹ in which the regular British Army was intended to be pulled back from Waziristan into the settled districts and responsibility of law and order to entrusted to the Militia. In the same context North Western Frontier Province was also formed in 1901 from the five districts² under the Punjab Government namely Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, Hazara and Derajat (Dera Ismail Khan, Dera Ghazi Khan & Dera Ghulam Khan). There were five agencies apart from these districts namely North Waziristan also known as Tochi Agency, South Waziristan also known as Wana Agency, Kurram, Khyber and Chitral (Dir & Swat). The agencies had a political officer who worked under the commissioner in case of Tochi Agency the Commissioner of Derajat was the incharge who exercised his authority through the political officer stationed at MiranShah. On Army side there were three independent brigades stationed at Kohat, Derajat and Bannu being part of the northern command, there were also two divisions of army one stationed at Peshawar and other at Rawalpindi. The agencies were dependent upon the Punjab Government before the raising of the new province for financial aspects and also to the Frontier Office of the Foreign Department Government of India which had its capital at Calcutta.

North Waziristan Militia was raised at Idak on 1st June 1900³ with 487 foot soldiers and thirty mounted infantry, there were three British officers Lieutenant Finnis, Lieutenant Godwin and the Commandant Captain Fergusson Davie. By end of the year the strength raised to 679 all ranks. Troops from regular army were also part of the NWM. The militia was organized on the pattern of regular native infantry regiment. NWM establishment had the similar authorization of manpower and horses but there was a difference in the equipment. There were 32 havildars authorized in NWM along with 32 lance naik where as in a regular army unit the number of havildar were 40 and lance naik were also 40. The role of Political Officers Tochi Valley, Captain Down and Mr Donald in the raising and support of the NWM is worth recording. The NWM had 800 foot sepoys and 50 mounted infantry sowars as part of establishment but it took almost a year before this strength was achieved.

¹ *Lord Curzon Speech at Quetta Durbar dated .at Peshawar Durbar on 24th April 1901. Also see Pall Mall Gazetteer, 2nd October 1900.*

² *Imperial Gazetteer p-27*

³ *Government of India Foreign Department letter No.1253 dated 15th May 1900, in it raising of two battalions of militia were sanctioned, one for North Waziristan & other for South Waziristan.*

NWM initially had no accommodation and they remained in bivouacs for almost a year. The space at Idak was limited and the two rooms available for officer's accommodation were shared with the assistant political officer, the telegraph office was also located in the same premises. The troops from regular army had volunteered for the NWM, money was not the key issue in this decision rather sense of adventure was the paramount factor. Majority of these troops had already been in the action as part of Tochi Force and as such the thrill of frontier warfare overcame the other inconveniences.

The rank and file distribution of the NWM by April 1901 was as under. Three British officers (in the official correspondence the word European has been used instead of British), one to act as commandant having a rank of captain, one second in command and one as adjutant. The native officers comprised of one subedar major, one Jemadar who also acted as native adjutant, one drill havildar, one drill naik, one English clerk and one reader; they all were part of headquarters and as such drew staff pay. There were eight subedars, a word about them they were categorized in terms of pay thus two senior most subedars were drawing a pay of Rupees two hundred and rest were paid slightly less than this. There were eight Jemadars also, 32 havildars, eight moharrars, eight paid havildars, 32 naik, eight buglers and 712 sepoys; they constitute foot infantry contingent. The mounted infantry comprised of 48 sepoys, one havildar and one Jemadar. In every battalion of British Infantry 160 men were trained as mounted infantry.

NWM was tactically organized into two wings known as right wing and left wing both commanded by senior subedars, each wing had four companies also commanded by subedars and Jemadars. There were a host of non combatants also being part of NWM. They include Ferrier in mounted infantry who looked after the horse's shoes, one mistri, one Tindal he looked after tents, magazines, collect lead, make up targets; a khalasi to assist the Tindal. One mochi, one darzi, ten bahishtis and ten sweepers. There was a medical establishment also which had two hospital assistant, two compounders, two dressers, two sweepers, two bahishtis and two langri. It is obvious that no carpenter is authorized in the over all establishment and neither cooks were authorized to the wings. There was no provision for officers mess and cook house for the troops in the establishment. In the regular army the concept of companies replaced the 'wings' in 1900 but NWM retained the nomenclature of wings. Indian army units were issued with .303 Magazine Rifles in 1900-01, the cavalry was armed with Lee Enfield carbines since 1897 and British Infantry units were equipped with Lee Metford rifles in 1899. In North Waziristan Militia initially there was reluctance on part of army to arm it with .303 Rifles as it was feared that the soldiers will runaway with new rifles but Captain Fergusson strongly pleaded in favour of arming the militia with new rifles but it took time.

DRILL

The most glaring aspect are the twenty drill sepoys and one drill havildar, it clearly indicates the importance of drill in training the tribesmen. For many of us in present era the most intriguing question is that how the British tamed or trained these tribesmen and the most logical answer lies in this overwhelming strength of drill instructors. For days nothing else was imparted to the newly inducted recruits but only drill movements which inculcated the discipline in them. The drill commands were all in English and all these instructors were from regular army who has volunteered for a minimum stay of five years in the NWM.

The role of NWM in the ab initio period was not very clear it all depended upon the outcome of the Mahsud blockade and the agreement with the Wazirs. As soon as the blockade was lifted the regular troops started pulling back and their positions were occupied by the NWM. The operational task of NWM

was to look after the Tochi Valley ‘ it is expected that the Tochi Valley will be partially handed over to the North Waziristan Militia, which is nearly ready to garrison the posts’.⁴

There were 16 posts that the NWM in the teething period looked after. They were as under (all distances in miles from Idak)

Bannu	38 miles
MirAli	10 miles
Saidgi	24 miles
Shinkai	20 miles
Katira	19 miles
Isha	3 miles
Tal	4 miles
Ahmedzai	5 miles
Semakone	5 miles
Wuzzi	10 miles
Muhammad Khel	14 miles
Tut Narai	21 miles
Kanirogha	20 miles
Datta Khel	25 miles

From October 1900 onwards the NWM troops started manning these posts as a result the requirement for an increase in the establishment was highlighted to the higher authorities. The normal channel of communication was to put up the demands to the political officer at MiranShah who if convinced would forward it to either commissioner or agent to the governor general at Peshawar. There existed a road fit enough for Tonga that runs from Bannu via MiranShah to Datta Khel.

FIRST REPORT

On 9th January 1901, the very first inspection of the NWM was carried out; on it depended the future of NWM. ‘Having just paid a visit to the Tochi Valley, I have the pleasure of reporting for the pleasure of Government of India, that the experience of raising a local militia has so far proved a complete success in Northern Waziristan. Captain Fergusson Davie has now strength of 697 rank & file. The recruits are of an excellent stamp and physique, as good as that of the men of any Punjab Frontier Force regiment...their drill is executed with smartness and precision. The native officers appear to be well selected...force is already accepting its share in the defence of the Tochi, Tutnarai...is held inefficiently...detachments have occupied the posts of MirAli, Saidgi, Ghalakote, Shinkai, Katira, Lakka Narai and Muhammad Khel. At the last named place I was particularly struck with the fact that Madda

Khel contingent was as good and cheerful as the rest of the militia...great credit on the Commandant , Captain Fergusson Davie'.⁵

TRIBAL COMPOSITION

North Waziristan Militia by end 1901 had strength of 736 soldiers with 357 belonging to local tribesmen and 379 to other. It comprised of 192 Utmanzai Wazirs, 81 Ahmadzai Wazirs, 81 Daurs, 3 Mahsuds and 95 Afridis; these tribes were regarded as local where as 59 Marwats, 57 Bannuchis, 137 Khattaks, 3 Yousafzais and 28 other Pathans were considered as part of British subjects. They were organized into eight companies. The Scarlet Thread of raising these militias revolved around having an almost equal number of troops⁶ inducted from local and British subject Pathan tribes. In the original plan one company of Daurs, one company of Ahmadzai Wazirs and two companies of Utmanzai Wazirs were to form as the local tribes. Two companies of Marwats, one company of Bhittanis and one company comprising of Khattaks and Bannuchis were to be raised; thus half the force of locals and half of other tribes. There was confusion in categorizing the tribes as locals and others on the reason that many of them especially the Wazirs had settled in the administrative boundaries of Bannu District and were recruited under the subject category. It seems trifle affair but this proved to be a catastrophic lacuna in later years especially in 1919. Bhittani Company was not raised and neither were they recruited in NWM for the reason that they preferred to be enrolled in South Waziristan Militia⁷. This was a sound policy and the prophecy that 'Wazirs would not be likely to differentiate them or stand aloof from the Wazirs that live on both sides of the Tochi Valley. All Wazirs would be apt to make a common cause'.⁸

POST AGE

Posts were and still are the most fundamental corner stone of frontier warfare, their importance in North Waziristan is closely linked to their location. It was not the discretion of the NWM to choose posts of their own liking rather every post has to be weighed politically and not militarily although in the end a compromise was always reached. Should they be isolated or should they be close enough to the population to influence the native tribes with the fruits of civilisation and to foster a friend ship bond were intriguing questions and had to be balanced. Captain Fergusson recommended that MiranShah be adopted as winter base and Datta Khel as a summer training camp. Tutnarai was a purely militia post, a cool summer resort. On the issue of posts Commandant Captain Fergusson recommended that the original strength of 800 foot soldiers and 50 sowars be augmented with additional 200 foot soldiers and 20 mounted sowars for the reason that a substantive strength has to be kept at Idak as reserves. This appreciation was pended by the Foreign Office on the recommendation of the army. The army point of

⁵ Foreign Department Frontier January 1901, No's 177-179 Report on the Recruitment & Efficiency of The Northern Waziristan Militia submitted by W.R.H. Merk Commissioner & Superintendent Derajat Division.

⁶ Foreign Department Letter No. 1953 F dated 15th May 1900& Punjab Government Letter No 796 Dated 25th June 1900, Tochi Scouts Archives, MiranShah.

⁷ Letter No. 58C dated 20th April 1901 & Letter No 784 Dated 23rd October 1900 by Commissioner Derajat. Tochi Scouts Archives.

⁸ Ibid.

view was that, till the time a clear picture does not emerge out of Waziristan there will be a constant and regular demand for increase in the militia strength thus they advice to wait and see⁹.

All in all 16 posts were initially to be manned by the NWM, two posts required one non commissioned officer each, six posts required two non commissioned officers each and seven posts were commanded by native officers and they required four non commissioned officers on each post, thus a total of 54 non commissioned officers were essential for the posts. Resultantly the numbers of havildars in each company were increased to five.

FIRST MILITARY EXPEDITION

The very first military expedition was undertaken by the Militia was in 1902 when NWM was employed against the Kabul Khel Wazirs. It was successful for the reason that NWM was able to provide protection to the retreating regular troops from forward posts and ensure that the lines of communication remains safe. The very fact that militia was lightly equipped enabled it to move at a much fast pace than the regular army units. Pigeons were employed for passing back the information to Idak; there were eight pigeon carriers then. The militia remained steadfast on its pledge of loyalty however there were four desertions in which the sepoys took the rifles with them later these were recovered through the political agent. This expedition brought forward a key lesson in frontier warfare that the military and political wing both needs a very close contact there fore it was decided even before the termination of the expedition that the Militia should move forward from Idak to MiranShah.

CAPTAIN ARTHUR FRANCIS FERGUSSON DAVIE

North Waziristan Militia was fortunate to have Captain Arthur Francis Fergusson Davie (53 Sikhs) as the founding father he was a tough officer an excellent shot and an exceptional rider. He above all had that head which makes a good frontier officer mainly to rely upon his own instincts and the desire to lead his men through example, he preferred a .30 Smith and Wesson revolver over the other arms and could put all six rounds in an inch, he was fluent in Punjabi and mastered his command over Pashto while he was serving in the frontier before raising the militia. It was Captain Fergusson who designed the very first crest of the Militia. From the official correspondence which took place during his tenure a picture emerges in which he is thinking all the times about the militia and how it can be made more useful. He frequently highlighted the necessary changes vital in man power and organisation in NWM which were omitted in the raising period. He is responsible for the increase in manpower and other equipment. Few letters have survived of his tenure in which he even pleaded to other British officers in the district administration for the welfare of his troops.

ESTABLISHMENT

When NWM was raised it was supposed to be at par with the Kurram Militia in terms of pay and allowances and other matters, however one of the key factor of British military culture has been the strict financial discipline in all aspect regarding expenditures incurred on army. In India it reached new heights because the inherent minute scrutiny of accounts by the natives resulted in NWM being treated financially on a lower tier. For instance the authorization of twenty sweepers was sanctioned after a prolong paper work. The NWM logic was that after darkness no gates are allowed to be opened at posts as it creates

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Letter No 646 Dated 14th March 1901, Fort Williams from H.Barnes Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign Department to Chief Secretary Government of Punjab.

opportunity for the thieves to strike, on the other hand if a soldier wants to attend the call of nature then he has to do it within the post area therefore the requirement of sweepers for every post is mandatory. Similarly the issue of cooks for the posts was highlighted that the sepoy after a day long work needs rest and without a cook he has to prepare the food himself. Practically the soldiers were cooking the food collectively known as 'handiwal'. The soldiers were not given free ration thus the arrangements were as under, a 'Chaudri' was nominated in each company who would collect and procure the food items for each company and then food was cooked either centrally for the company or individually by the handiwal, the cooked food was given one final touch by adding condiments known as 'tarka'. This custom is still present in Tochi Scouts in a somewhat similar pattern where even the cooked food is given a 'tarka' by the soldiers in their barracks; it has got nothing to do with the standard of cooking but more as a tradition or Riwaj. Banya was another character, a Hindu who in simple terms was a shopkeeper of the NWM, he would procure the items from Bannu and then sell it in NWM, and he was paid for this. Ferrier induction also has a back ground in the initial days he was not part of the establishment, the practice in other militias was to enrol a Ferrier as a soldier who would perform the duty of Ferrier rather than that of soldier. Captain Fergusson highlighted that where as the pay of a soldier with all his allowances was Rupees 20 and if Ferrier is enrolled then he would be paid rupees 16 only thus it still saves the government, on the other hand a soldier employed as Ferrier is a loss to the state and Militia. Carpenter was another issue as government was interested in that all such works is done by the Public Works Department's carpenter however in the end Captain Fergusson was able to get his point through. Socially these classes does not exists in the tribal area therefore darzi, mochi, tarkhan and baunya had to be lured from the Punjab. Idak was not a good choice as a raising station, it was too small and cramped, and in 1903 a portion of the post was demolished to make more room for the troops.

There were instances of desertion among the scouts who ran away with the official issued rifle but then they were apprehended through the men who brought them for recruitment. The daily routine in NWM started with the Fajr prayers the majority of the soldiers were strict in following the religion and here again was the difference between the regular army unit and the NWM. In regular army the class composition was based upon the Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus but in NWM it was only Muslims who were the fighting force the small number of non Muslims were mainly for menial task and as such were kept separate from the militia with separate living quarters consisting of tent their food was cooked separately and they ate separately. The reveille was sounded and even before it the syce groomed the horses for morning training. In the summer the horses were given work early in the morning. There was a physical training period for the newly inducted recruits and soldiers; mostly running. Breakfast would be consumed after sunrise and then a day long training which was revolving around drill. Office routine was simple as there was no typewriter and all correspondence conducted in handwritten notes. Gasht was an important part of training in which long distances (10 -15 miles) were covered on foot and also by mounted infantry.

Hakim Dost Muhammad was the hospital assistant but in reality he was recruited as hakim keeping in view the social pattern of the natives who were not comfortable with the concept of doctor.

PAY SCALES

NWM was not an ideological military unit its life line depended on keeping the native soldiers contented with good pay and other amenities and only then to expect a return in the form of loyalty and discipline. There were discrepancies in the pay of NWM troops and regular army. Subedar Major in NWA was drawing Rupees 150 only where as the same rank was drawing Rs 150 and a field batta of Rs

15 along with free ration. In some cases the terms offered to the regular army while attracting them to serve in NWM were not fulfilled for instance a Havildar Major was offered Rs 28-8-0 which included Rs 15 as pay, staff pay of Rs 10 and Rs 3/8/- as compensation of free ration but he was being paid only Rs 25/8/- (Rs 18 as pay, Rs 7/8/- as staff pay) where as in regular army he would have been getting a total of Rs 26/- (Pay Rs 16/-, Staff Pay Rs 5/-, Good conduct pay and field batta of Rs 5/- along with free ration or Rs 3/8/0). The allowances of British officers were another issue because they were being paid less than that of Kurram Militia officers. The Commandant of NWM was drawing an allowance of Rs 100 as political agency and Rs 400 as staff pay where as the Commandant of Kurram Militia was drawing a staff pay of Rs 500. Captain Fergusson raised this issue as a matter of principal because it undermines the equality among the militias. Similarly the soldiers were paid only Rs 20 as a onetime allowance for purchase of uniform and subsequently only Rs 5 was given yearly as kit allowance which was insufficient. There was no provision of warm weather clothing for the troops. For the purpose of income tax act the NWM was placed as on same footing as that of Her Majesty's Indian Forces.

Lieutenant Governor agreed to the recommendations of the Commandant NWM regarding the pay discrepancies and stated 'Lieutenant Governor cannot resist the conclusion that as long as regulars are employed in Waziristan the native officers and men should receive the same pay...the grant to regulars seconded for service in the militia of same concessions as enjoyed by the troops serving in Waziristan and also an increase to the numbers of havildars and naik fixed for each corps'.¹⁰

The annual cost of NWM amounted to Rs 1, 70, 940 in year 1901 inclusive of pay and allowances. The monthly expenditures on stationery were Rs 40/, on firewood Rs 120/ only for five months in a year and Rs 60/ were spent on telegrams, repair of tents cost Rs 18/ are some of the amounts that were expended out of annual grant given to NWM.

MOVE TO MIRANSHAH 1904

On 16th October 1904 the North Waziristan Militia moved to MiranShah (3357 North 707 East) from Idak and ever since this town has remained as the permanent home of Militia. The decision to move from Idak was undertaken in April 1902 and construction of accommodation started at MiranShah which was already an army post. The initial layout of camp was mud brick construction covering an area of 400 square yards; the stables were kept outside the walled perimeter. The transfer of luggage and other equipment from Idak was an experience, it was conducted through horse driven carts and Hindu coolies; over one hundred such coolies were employed for this operation. MiranShah has a field elevation of 3050 feet, in 1904 it comprised of 3-4 hamlets having a population of 24000. It had a government school and a hospital. It was feverish and unhealthy between August–October. The strength of North Waziristan Militia was 1318 men including 106 mounted infantry. Regular troops left the garrison by end 1904 and only NWM and political offices were the main occupant apart from the agency doctor. MiranShah was barren and very little vegetation was visible. Trees were few and water scarce. On the positive end was the availability of vast expanse of flat ground for training.

By 23rd April 1904 Boya, Kajauri and Saidgi posts were handed over to the NWM; Boya was handed over on 15th June 1903. The major posts manned by NWM were Datta Khel, Tutnarai, Spin Khaisora, Muhammad Khel, MiranShah, Tal, Katra and Saidgi where as Isha, Shinkai, Mir Ali and Sur Kumar were regarded as minor posts. Idak was also considered as a major post. A further augmentation of 30 sowars was sanctioned in the NWM for the

manning of major posts. It should be kept in mind that in a regular British Infantry¹¹ unit the total strength was 1034 all ranks including 29 officers and 1005 soldiers, in Indian native unit the strength was 927 all ranks with 13 British officers and 16 Native officers; thus NWM had more strength than both of these regular unit yet it was commanded by a captain, it speaks good of officers and also on the quality of native officers in keeping such a strength under control. The minimum height for enrolment in NWM was five feet four inches with an age bracket of 16-25. The service was for three years and non pensionable. MiranShah was the only place in Waziristan which offered any sort of comfort. In 1910 even two nursing sisters came to look after patients. It was to be many a years before MiranShah saw their likes again

On 25th September 1905¹² a gasht of NWM was ambushed at Spina Khaisora by Ilm Din and his gang, the gasht comprising of twelve sepoys was passing through a gorge when all of a sudden the leading scout was hit by a bullet in the chest. Rest of the sepoys took cover behind the stones but they were unable to locate the attackers and they just waited patiently but it was a fatal mistake as the next round of the volley came from an unexpected direction and took the life of another sepoy. The Militia challenged the attackers to come out in open as it is against the ethics to fire from cover. They fired back and were able to reach the safety with two more sepoys wounded. They got the dead bodies back later.

Captain Fergusson on promotion reverted back to regular army and in his place came Captain Jacob from 30th Baloch Regiment but he stayed as commandant for a year. The initial years of North Waziristan Militia till 1907 when the Frontier Corps Headquarters was raised at Peshawar were the teething period in its history it was commanded by captains, as Captain Dodd of 27th Punjab regiment commanded it from 1905 -1908 and later his unit officer Captain Keene also commanded the NWM for a year before the first field officer Major Moneile from 19 Lancers came for command. Keene had served the Militia as Lieutenant at MiranShah thus he was well conversed with the role of it and more importantly knew the men and their language very well. It was Keene who gave his pocket watch as marriage gift to his orderly. Keene had a volatile temper and he paid dearly for this, he was shot on his right side by a sentry early morning outside the mess.¹³ Keene survived. The reason is not clear but one tradition is that Keene was playing piano early in the morning in Mess and did not pause when the Fajr prayers were being called.

Militia had varying charter of duties, on 23rd August 1910 an Indian mail cart was looted near Bannu in which the mail remained unmolested but the Tehsildar of Tank was killed and another three passengers were kidnapped. The event took place at 1300 hours and by 1900 hours Lieutenant E.P. Quinan along with ten other sepoys were hunting the bandits and after two days of hectic chase they finally got the bandits trapped and freed the hostages, a havildar of Militia was wounded.¹⁴

11 *Gazetteer of India Volume 4, pp. 368-378.*

12 *The Times 27th September 1905 issue.*

13 *Daily Exeter & Plymouth Gazette 29th April 1909 also see Manchester Courier & Lancashire General Advertiser of same date.*

14 *Ibid, 22nd August 1910 issue.*